THE ARCHITECT PAINTER VISION QUEST: SIGNIFICANT PLACE. Ultimately, all architectures we call great, let alone those we call serious, answer this question: *How do we make in this world a Significant Place to be?* Because the word *building* derives from an ancient word that means "to be." And a truly Significant Place feels important, influential, or special—because it means something. And so we wonder: How can we construct an enduring dwelling? A shelter from the ordinary and the unbearable? A refuge for contemplation and invention? A precinct of poetry and order? A sanctuary for imagination, study, work and rest? How can we establish foundations—for a paradise regained? How can we structure the solid and the void of human existence, the visible and the invisible, make manifest the ardent will to form and the relentless demand to mean, and realize the presence of transcendent architectures that illumine the mind and move the heart, that uplift the eyes and stir the soul? How can we make of building art? How can we make an architecture that reflects the architecture of our being? An architecture that gives outer expression to the ontology of our inner vision? How can we disclose the true form of the edifice of the world . . . through exquisite reflections of beauty and intelligence in habitable form? Architecture presents limitless possibilities for expression of Significant Form and Significant Space: Significant Place.

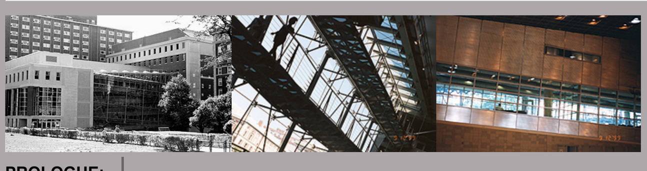
"The Opojaz critics firmly believed that before trying to explain anything, one should find out what it is." _Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism*

Space-Defining Form

A critique of architect BERNARD TSCHUMI'S LERNER HALL at Columbia University probes the difference between LITERAL COLLAGE and PHENOMENAL COLLAGE.

ROOK'S MOVE: The Phenomenon of Collage | The Crisis of Abstraction

"Rook's Move" defines two basic types of collage that I call ***literal collage*** and ***phenomenal collage***:
Literal Collage involves a subjective goal: **a creative assemblage of materials or forms**.
Phenomenal collage involves an objective goal: **a creative assemblage of materials or forms that also expresses visual and conceptual ambiguity of Figure and Field.**
In a high-profile project that tries to "blend" new work with existing buildings, **which type of collage do the architects of Lerner Hall use?**



PROLOGUE:__|
I completed the following episodic critique of Bernard Tschumi's new Student Center for Columbia University on **9.9.99**, the day I launched this website (www.thearchitectpainter.com). I wrote the "essay" mainly during August 1999. Now, two months later (November 1999), I continue to ponder Tschumi's work, and I still think that my critique makes sense. I just sent the following letter to the editor of the **Columbia Spectator**.

NYC | 11.11.99

TO THE EDITOR: Regarding "Rants, Raves and Ramps"

. . . and Reflections

There's more to the story of Lerner Hall than press raves and student rants, as reported in your Nov. 8 article "Rants, Raves and Ramps." There are also professional reflections. You can check out mine at *deep_SIGHT REVIEW* at www.thearchitectpainter.com. Robert Campbell's critique in this month's Architectural Record offers a similar point of view, dialectical in its expression of appreciation and perplexity (in fact, his take is so strikingly similar to mine that even some of his language is the same--e.g., he uses the term "bookends" to describe the relationship of the masonry blocks to the glazed ramp section).

While my specific take on this odd project is perhaps difficult--I parse **the meaning of collage**, which I maintain is the work's implied theoretical/visual premise--my general take is simple: Lerner Hall has stunning flashes of brilliance (as well as some rather surprising clumsy moments), but it's larger signification is one of missed opportunity.

Whatever the sociological strengths or weaknesses prove to be over time, the ramps and their glass enclosure are a self-evident formal/spatial architectural success. Their progressive spirit and the transparent drama of interiority revealed to the campus in cinematic-like ways are significant contributions to the architecture of New York City. Tschumi (with Gruzen Samton Associated Architects) has deftly revisited the lessons of modern-architecture's zig-zag promenade, made famous by the experimentations of this century's most important architect, Le Corbusier. And on the delayed ascent, which includes the beautiful tilted banks of stainless-steel mailboxes, a heightened sense of the precarious or abnormal, of an impalpable disturbance, inspires reflection--by **defamiliarizing the everyday world**, Tschumi calls into question our sense of basic normative conditions such as safety and what's level.

But of course the dramatic ramp-space, with its tough-cool physical elements, interrogative psychological/visual devices and techno-modern glazed enclosure, is only a small part--say, 9%?--of the real estate of this big project. And while it's understandable that popular opinion and press reviews have focused on this **ramp-space 9%--it's not only the most exciting part, we also sense the substance of its authenticity, untrammeled by banality**--the professional insider faces the problem of sizing up the other 91% of the building, the relationship of the glazed ramps to this 91%, and, ultimately, the relationship of the totality to the unique and demanding physical and cultural/intellectual context.

And so we're forced to ask some tough questions: In a century that has seen Harvard authorize Le Corbusier to build the masterful Carpenter Center (the iconic modern ramp-building in this country, whose formal coherence is didactic in ways that transcend ramp) and has seen the Guggenheim authorize Frank Gehry to build with unfettered freedom his uncompromising museum in Bilbao--**what does Lerner Hall signify?** Given what can be accomplished when genius is decisively supported and originality is allowed, even asked, to occupy the edge of human capability, it's difficult to conclude that Lerner Hall, on the eve of a new epoch, signifies other than a timid in-between position, one caught between opposing forces, fettered by limitations that rest principally on a mistaken idea of what constitutes persuasive response strategies to--and visual respect for--context.

As the ramps of Lerner Hall so poetically, almost literally, suggest, a building can signify in some ineffable, figurative way **a remembrance of the mythical first architecture, the Labyrinth, by the mythical first architect, the winged-Daedalus**. Daedalus is of course the daring vulnerable hero-artificer that ennobles Joyce's own artifice, Stephen Daedalus, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. And in Stephen's search for the "**ultraprofound**," he is awakened to the ardent purpose of virtually all makers, of all those who are engaged in the construction of labyrinths, be they the labyrinths of language or form: **"To discover the mode of life or of art whereby your spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom."**

One dares to imagine what could be achieved were Columbia to give **unclipped wings** to an architect in its next (post-2000) project of significance--to imagine an advanced architecture of ideas, by a brilliant architect such as Tschumi or Gehry or Zaha Hadid or Rem Koolhaas or Stephen Holl or Eisenman or many others, in which the percentages of Lerner Hall were, at the very least, reversed: 9% limitation/**91% Bilbao-like Daedalusian freedom**. Thereby giving **flight** to us all.

And one is hard-pressed to imagine that McKim, Mead & White's buildings, and the venerable legacy of Columbia, as well as the interests of the dynamic and contemplative Metropolis, could be more authentically honored.

NYC | 9.9.99

ROOK'S MOVE _ the phenomenon of collage | the crisis of abstraction

_e p i g r a p h s
1. There are many architectures. _Emily Madison Hildner (when she was 10)
2. Rooks move, do they not? _Jonathan Benchley, 14th-century Jesuit priest
3. All is number. _Pythagorus ...7.1.6.3.4.3.5.3.8.9.7.6.5.5.5.9.6.4.7.5.8.1.9.9....10



PREFACE:

Bernard Tschumi's new building for Columbia University raises questions about many serious and universal architectural issues, not the least of which is the problem of **the meaning of context:** Assuming that it's a desirable goal, and I believe in this case it is, how does a new architecture genuinely and meaningfully respect an exisiting context? What is the compelling **organizational**, **visual,** and **theoretical** basis for the manifestation of this respect? What makes an architecture contextual versus **a**contextual, and which is Lerner Hall? In the **chess game** between sentimentality and **abstraction**, continuity and **dis**continuity, literal and **lateral**, how does an architecture heighten perception of the point/counter-point between exisiting and new? What is the advanced visual and intellectual basis for profound, challenging (disturbing, illuminating, **didactic**, edifying?) **relationships** between existing and intervening architectures--between, in this case, late nineteenth-century American neo-classicism (the original Columbia University buildings of McKim, Mead & White) and a pre-new-millenium architecture that carried with it the promise of the avant-garde? . . . especially in the *context* of an advanced intellectual institution in an advanced cultural city?

ULTIMATELY, these questions of context, and related questions in regard to SIGNIFICANT FORM and SIGNIFICANT SPACE, can be situated within a larger conceptual framework. For, however these questions may be answered, whatever the cultural politics may be that have resulted in what we see here, there remains, I believe, the complex twentieth-century idea and invention that implicitly underlies Tschumi's new work and its attitude toward context and formal/spatial interrelationships, namely, **collage**. I write here about the meaning of **collage** and the correlative problem of the meaning of **abstraction**.

[Note: for background on the **architecture/chess-analogy**, the underlying theme of this critique, see my essay http://www.thearchitectpainter.com/MadisonGray/deep_SIGHT/reviews/moma_KnightMoves.htm]

1__

Site/Sight trips

The following narrative accounts of my first 5 visits to the site resulted in formulation of the idea of **literal and phenomenal collage** . . . and of the perception of an inherent **crisis of abstraction**...

VISIT 1 Wednesday 8.18.99
Duality
I'm writing this on 8.21.99 Saturday morning 3:46 am, after writing about visit 3, below (got a late start)... I've said everything I want to say already. Inside way cool. Outside a problem.

VISIT 2 Thursday 8.19.99.
Zero to Ten
Last night my former student DK and I did a guerilla run through the building, snapping some digital photos of the cool things we liked. We really liked so many things about the inside of the building. And agreed, as below (see Visit 3 commentary, written before this), that 91% of the outside -- the non-ramp part -- is a problem. But the good parts are really good. DK's simpatico exhilaration, appreciation, and same-wave-length perplexity was invigorating. Thanks to DK I increased my resolve to quantify the project, like a judge at an Olympic ice-skating or gymnastics event. The numbers are in. They give chess players ratings don't they? Hence the creation of the deep_SIGHT | **Zero-to-Ten Index** (see below) . . .

VISIT 3 Friday 8.20.99
Ramps Happen. Shift Happens.
Visit 3 to Bernard Tschumi's tilting hyper-tech ramp intensive interior at his new student Center for Columbia University between 114th & 115th on the east side of Broadway on the upper West Side of Manhattan. Visit 2 was last night with a former student. Visit 1 was during the day two days ago. I'll start here. Then go back and recount visits two and one -- suavely deploying the chronologic device of regression-slash-recession...

Cooooooooool. That's really what it is. A problem, an enigma, but ultimately cool. A 10 experience, or at least a 9, all things considered -- inside. Another guerrilla blitz. A lot shorter this time -- 31 minutes. Still no students back. I love how empty it is. Simultaneously charged and void. Dynamic and serene. Serene and desolate. Serene desolation. Tonight's visit, with a non-architect friend, was ultraprofound (Joyce's word, *Portrait of the Artist*, 1914) because the fire alarm system was being tested, lights flashing and ear-splitting painful piercing sounds eerily pounding home the sci-fi this-must-be-a-Rod-Serling/Stanley-Kubrick-movie-set year-2000 spirit of the muscular seems-a-lot-like-a-penitential-cellblock-there's-so-much-steel interior. It was just the 24-hour security guard and us. No one else around. The building doesn't officially open until 8.31.99, but I can get in any hour because I have a mailbox on the 4th floor -- box number ____ . It's a trip I'm going to like making because without a doubt this perplexing work is the best example, at least that I'm aware of, of the avant-garde in Manhattan pre-2000. Ramps happen.

-- "Did Tschumi do this part on Broadway, too?" asked my friend. "That glass ramp part is really cool, but did he do the brick part, too?????"
-- "You mean the part that looks sort of like the existing buildings next to it? Yeah, he did that. Wild, huh? McKim, Mead & White did those buildings about 100 years ago "
-- "Wow.... I don't get it," continued my Mad Ave friend, who writes-funny (we're talkin' WAY funny) ad-copy for a living, "Why would he do that?" (he's not trying to be funny)
-- "I don't know. But it's a problem, isn't it? I just can't help thinking that Rem Koolhaas wouldn't have done that. No way Rem does that."
-- "Who's Rem?"
-- "Well, he's a Dutch architect, hypermodern -- real important, like Tschumi. I just can't see Rem doing some neo-19th-century "post-modern" match-and-blend scheme. Or Gehry. Or Hadid. It's the 21st century."
-- "Who?"
-- "Zaha Hadid. She's a London-based Iraqi architect. First woman in the history of the planet of international significance in architecture."
-- "Oh. So it's kind of either like retro nostaligia or *trompe- l'oeil* or a harmony-thing or something? Seems pretty conservative. But maybe its supposed to be sardonic, you think?"
-- "Well, he's the Dean of Columbia's School of Architecture, and he's remarkably talented. I love his Parc de la Villette project in Paris. Some cool stuff, red metal panel, 1917ish Russian Constructivist."
-- "Maybe that would have been good here."
-- "I like the way you think."

Having now moved inside the campus, looking at the campus-side entrance, northeast corner of Lerner, adjacent to Butler Library, my friend continues...

-- "Must be Columbia. Politics. We've got that in advertising too."
-- "I guess. Maybe his hands were tied. But it doesn't explain everything," I said.
-- "I know what you mean. Look at that corner! What's with that round brick column??? I don't know much about architecture, but... And It doesn't look like that part has anything to do with the ramp. It looks like two different architects did it. The first part was built like 40 years ago or something and they hired Tschumi to come in and renovate it and he made this super-cool sinking ship glass blue-light modern thing."
-- "Yeah, It looks like the Titanic, doesn't it? Like it's sinking into the water. Nice," I waxed.
-- "Like the Titanic hit an iceberg. Or got wedged between two icebergs," said my friend, trying to get a handle on the incongruity.
-- "Titanic: 10. Icebergs: 5...? -- big iceberg: 6.1, small iceberg 3.9," I summed up, using the zero-to-ten scoring system.
-- "The icebergs look like Ohio,1958."
-- "Titanic meets icebergs: 3.2," I continued.
-- "Tough score."
-- "I know. So when it get's right down to it, whaddawegot? The cool Titanic part is, what, 9% of the project? And the Ohio-1958 iceberg parts are 91%?"

As we begin heading back through Columbia's main gates at 116th and Broadway, we reflect some more. First me...

-- "Well, I think the underlying contention is collage. You know, glueing. Like Braque and Picasso in 1912. Glue a ticket stub to a piece of chair caning to some paint on canvas to a playing card to a drawing of a clarinet or a fruit bowl. Synthesize a new world of forms from everyday stuff. Make art by heightening perception of the inherent plastic properties of the banal."
-- "So the idea here is to collage super-tech 2000 to Ohio 1958?"
-- "Looks that way. Glue an Xtra Large '70s historio-postmodernist take on McKim, Mead &White's late 19th-century neoclassicism to a Small take on '90s techno-modernism."
-- "It's tough. I wonder what the guys in Sing-Sing would think of all this. I mean whaddathey say, "Hey, Harry, these ramp lines are kind of like Frank Gehry over at Attica, don't you think," said Mad Ave, recalling our penal associations of the interior.
-- "So: 9% Titanic super-tech 2000 -- 10; ......glued to 91% Iceburgs Ohio-1958 slash postmodernism -- 5;....equals what?"...I continue to number crunch.
-- "At least the glass/ramp part is terrific."
-- "That's for sure. It's the only part of the building where the spirit of the interior makes itself apparent. Conceal and Reveal. Too bad the building isn't inside out. That mailbox wall would make a great facade".
-- "A conundrum," says my friend (and he used to drive a cab).
-- "A missed opportunity."
-- "Yeah."
-- "If you could just rework a bit so that...," I tried to put my finger on it.
-- "What?"
-- "I dunno. So that there's more . . . **lobster**?"

VISIT 4 Tuesday 8.24.99
the pieces and the game; or, of meatloaf and lobster

The Opojaz critics firmly believed that before trying to explain anything, one should find out what it is...before trying to explain anything, one should find out what it is...find out what it is....what it is....what it is....what it is....what it is...

I shift my thinking. And I think I've got it. I wrestle with this building. With its unsettling dichotomy. But I know what it is.

It came to me, as I strolled through campus today from the Avery architecture library, that it's like an accordian.....two handles with a stretchy part in between. I'm talking about the iconic view from Lowe Library looking at the northeast corner with the brick column. Then, finally, I made the leap: to chess, specifically to the way a **rook moves**, to Picasso, "Violin," 1912, and the chess-like diagrammatic devices of synthetic Cubism generally (e.g., solid/void, positive/negative, figure/sub-figure, cut/intercut, contingency/sub-contingency, and phenomenal versus literal transparency) -- principles that I now see clearly this project is not about, though the latent presence of an elementary "rook's move" can be inferred -- shift *could have* happened.......and finally to food -- meatloaf and lobster. I must be hungry...

[to be continued...]

Thursday 8.26.99
chess moves...versus chess pieces (or, the problem of designing excellent pieces versus playing an excellent game)
...for background on this philosophy, see http://www.thearchitectpainter.com/MadisonGray/deep_SIGHT/reviews/moma_KnightMoves.htm

"...playing intensely the architectural game." _Le Corbusier
...meatloaf & lobster...two pebbles and a diamond...the ho-hum and the special, the everyday and art. All architectures can be (perhaps, inevitably, must be) evaluated on the basis of their double responsibility -- analogizing to chess -- to design both excellent chess pieces and play an excellent chess game. At the ultimate level of championship play, as it were (especially appropriate right at this moment in light of the current World Chess Championship in Las Vegas: http://www.worldfide.com/chess/index.html), an equilibrium of excellence is achieved in which there is manifest an inextricable reciprocity or interdependence of the intellectual/aesthetic/visual principles that underlie their (inter) relationship.

Great Pieces + Great Game = 10

What is the "Pieces + Game" score for this project?

VISIT 5 Thursday 9.2.99
Heightening perception of the abnormal...what's level? what's safe?

"The purpose of art is to disturb." _Georges Braque

There is a moment on level 1 (the main campus entrance is level 2) where the idea of "level" is called into question. And the phenomenon of disorientation, as one stands and tries with little certainty to determine where the datum of horizontality is (as I did again today with another former student, PM, and a few days ago with my brother [an unrecorded visit]) is quite wonderful. The devices of tilting and counter-tilting are intensified. The sloping ramps overhead and adjacent, the rotation/crank and counter-rotation/crank of the aluminum and glass interior facade (concealing the presence of a surprisingly large room, an auditorium, behind it), and the presumably level wood floor that looks anything but contribute to a beautiful fugue of horizontal disorientation. This theme, whereby the experience of the interior heightens one's perception of the abnormal, is also made manifest in the precarious-feeling steel and glass-floor ramps, which traverse, through complex structural attachment, the monumental facade of glass that fronts on the campus. (The glass ramp-flooring is transluscent, not transparent, which, though obviously more practical, helps explain why the experience is less exhilarating than one might have anticipated.) Through tilting and danger (what's level? is it safe?), Tschumi has successfully and satisfyingly heightened perception of the abnormal.

the best room/the best move...

"What's with the outside?...It's a one-move building. Put all your money in the ramp and the heck with everything else...The auditorium is the best part of the project and just what it needs." _PM

Oddly enough, perhaps, the surprise room, the XL auditorium mentioned above, makes the project. The device of delay, whose effect is surprise, is successfully employed here: there is no hint of this room outside, nor is there any hint inside, when within the contracted narrow public circulation/meeting space of the ramps. And the spatial amplitude of the room breathes remarkable life into the project. Moreover, the literal transparency though the north interior facade of the auditorium -- which allows "horizontal" views through to the ramps and to the outside -- and the facade itself, a perforated, corrugated aluminum-clad surface delimiting the intruding tilted volume that reads through from the ramped-interior (the rare, but brilliant, moment of phenomenal transparency), contribute to my sense (and PM's as well) that this is the BEST MOVE -- the defining moment of excellence, where the veritable architecture of the project takes place. This facade, functioning as an iconic device of literal and phenomenal transparency, is the project's most coherent, unequivocal signifier of modernism...and the best hint of the spirit of the 2000-is-here avant-garde.

2__

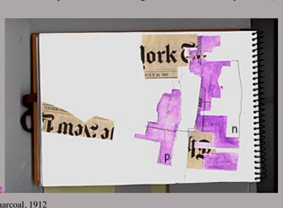
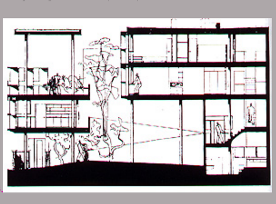
Collage: *literal vs. phenomenal*; or, how to classify types of moves...

What is collage?

Is it simply the **disparate, *physical* assemblage** of like and unlike fragments?. . . **invented** or **borrowed** from an adjacent, exisiting **stylistic context**? The **stylistic integration** and/or **opposition** of ***materials***? Deployed in an effort to underscore an **ambiguity** and/or **clarity** of **old** *versus* **new**? A little (or a lot) of McKim, Mead & White emulation here, an aluminum-clad shed-like structure (that looks like an existing temporary site-structure) on the roof there; a corner, round brick column here (alluding simultaneously to the brick walls and the upper-level round (limestone) columns of the adjacent Butler Library); flanking masonry volumes and an in-between glass enclosed ramp volume there? Perhaps. But it may well be that, as with **transparency**, which Rowe and Slutzky differentiated as literal (a property of the optical) and phenomenal (a property of the organizational), a helpful distinction could be drawn between **literal collage**, which these devices describe, and **phenomenal collage**. And so it is to Braque and Picasso, who invented collage (literally, "glueing") in **1912**, to their revolutionary **Synthetic Cubist researches**, that I turn to define two basic types of collage:

Literal collage involves a subjective goal: **a creative assemblage of materials or forms.**
whereas
Phenomenal collage involves an objective goal: **a creative assemblage of materials or forms that also expresses visual and conceptual ambiguity of Figure and Field**.

THRESHOLD: Thus the following illustrations and discussion function as a **lens for viewing the idea of collage**, which is, at least by implication, at the very core of not only Tschumi's Lerner Hall but much of current form-making, including that of Frank Gehry. (Is Gehry's work more a reflection of an understanding of phenomenal collage or literal collage?) All seven illustrations are examples of Synthetic Cubist and Synthetic Cubist-inspired **space making/form making devices** -- i.e., **phenomenal collage**. They illustrate visual "chess moves" in the game of solid/void "chess-piece" deployment. They illustrate the complex interrelationships of **figure/field-based organizational structures**. Principal **devices** include **interlocking**, inter**cut**ting, contingent/**sub-contingent** development, **in**completion, **frag**mentation, and the primary assertion of the **void**. For an example of the opposite type, **literal collage**, see Picasso's **Still life with chair-caning**, in the article that provides the background for this essay, **"Collage Reading: Braque | Picasso"** by Jef7rey HILDNER in the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture Annual Proceedings 84, 1996, pp. 181-187: http://www.thearchitectpainter.com/surface_7ARCHITECT/articles/collagereading.htm.

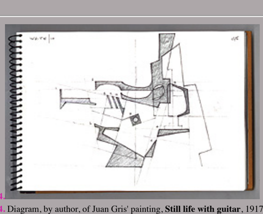
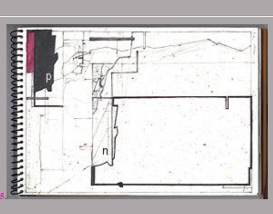
1. Picasso, **Violin**, pasted paper and charcoal, 1912
2. Author, **Knight's Move _NYT: cut, separate, slide**, pasted paper, pencil and gouache, 1997
3. Le Corbusier, **Maison Currutchet**, section, 1949

1. Picasso's **Violin** illustrates the simple device-sequence underlying what I call the **Knight's Move** -- that is, figural diagonal displacement (though inspired by Braque's revolutionary, original work in this regard, this Picasso is especially easy to read). Here, the two dark sepia shapes of text, idiosyncratic and contingent, are not only intercut and therefore **codependent with the void** of the white space around them (or, is the white space solid and the dark shapes void?), but they are also clearly **intercontingent** relative to each other: Imagine them as originally conjoined in the upper right corner, then cut apart and diagonally separated. The sequence of **moves/devices** Picasso implictly employed is actually susceptible to even finer analysis by simply retracing the sequence in reverse and reuniting the two shapes or "chess pieces." For example, move the lower piece (the "knight") as follows: flip horizontally, slide up, move right, join. The original move, then, comprises four elementary devices in reverse: **cut, separate, slide/shift, flip**.

2. The author's pasted-paper collage **Knight's Move _NYT: cut, separate, slide** illustrates a similar, simpler sequence of diagonal displacement, involving the solid (**p** -- positive) and the void (**n** = negative). Like the Picasso, it allows other readings, including those in which both figures are dynamic rather than regarding one as stationary (e.g., substitute the device "**shift**" for "slide" and immediately the displacement activates both pieces after their separation).

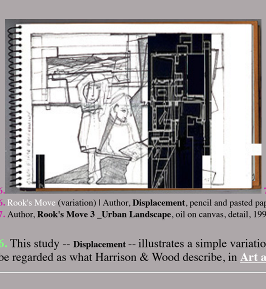
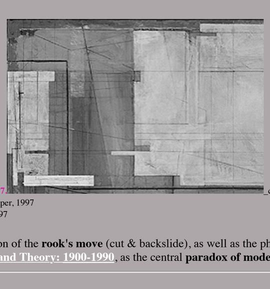
3. That **Le Corbusier** understood the figure/field lessons of collage is clear in the **rook's move** of this small house (**Maison Currutchet**, above). The tall left fragment, which includes the open-air roof terrace, and the larger right fragment may be understood as having "originally" formed a single cubic mass. Their implied orthogonal displacement or separation to the current position (e.g., think of the left fragment as having been pulled away from the original mass -- **sliiiiiiiiiiiiiide** left) expands the boundaries of the rectangular field and thus recomplicates the volume and enriches the inside/outside relationships of the house. Through his **negative-positive form making**, Le Corbusier has created a 50/50 solid/void structure in which the **negative space** is as equally figural and important as the positive forms. Thus here, as in the pasted paper collages, perhaps the most significant act is the creation of **the codependent space between**, to which the rook's move is subservient. This in-between "space" may be either a solid or a void (in Le Corbusier's building it is a codependent void -- outside space; in Tschumi's building it is an independent solid -- the glass-enclosed ramps), and it may function ambiguously as much as a field as a figure. Ultimately, it manifests the properties of interconnection, such that, as in a jigsaw puzzle piece, it is simultaneously autonomous and a dynamic, contingent **fragment of a larger whole**.

If the **Knight's Move** is ***diagonal* displacement**, especially of reciprocal figures, what I call the **Rook's Move** is simply ***orthogonal* displacement** of the same.

4. Diagram, by author, of Juan Gris' painting, **Still life with guitar**, 1917
5. Knight's move | Author, **Piero Abstract_**, pencil and gouache, 1997

4. & 5. These two drawings reinforce the theme of **fractured, contingent, figural interlock** and **the recomplication of surface**; i.e., phenomenal collage or the ambiguity of figure/field. The diagram of Gris's **Still life with guitar** indicates his important research into space-defining devices. Drawing **Piero Abstract_** also illustrates, again, the **n**egative-**p**ositive diagonal move of the cut-figure "knight" and the codependent space between...

_click to see full painting

6. Rook's Move (variation) | Author, **Displacement**, pencil and pasted paper, 1997
7. Author, **Rook's Move 3 _Urban Landscape**, oil on canvas, detail, 1997

6. This study -- **Displacement** -- illustrates a simple variation of the **rook's move** (cut & backslide), as well as the phenomenon of **spatial contraction** -- **deep space/shallow space** -- and the concomitant property of **figure/field ambiguity**. Plus, it also hints at perhaps the most subversive proposition of modernism. Integral to phenomenal collage and the idea of **abstraction**, wherein object and background (figure and field) may be **conflated** or **interlocked**, this proposition might be regarded as what Harrison & Wood describe, in **Art and Theory: 1900-1990**, as the central **paradox of modernism**:

Paradox of Modernism: the assertion of the autonomy of form *versus* the destruction of the autonomy of the object.

7. Finally: this painting gives expression to the idea of **negative space** and **solid/void ambiguity** -- intrinsic to the **interlocking matrix** of the rectangular field is the basic **orthogonal displacement** of the ***rook's move*** and the ***codependent space between***...

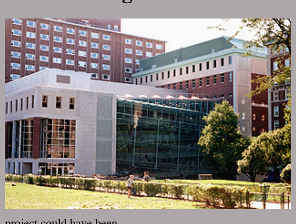
Therefore,

.......one may well argue that all architectures are located on a **sliding scale** that runs from **literal collage** to **phenomenal collage** -- and thus on an interactive double-sliding scale that runs from **autonomous form** to **representational form** and from **autonomous object** to **contingent object**. It is not a matter of **either/or** but degree. To what **degree**, in other words, is Tschumi's building about literal collage, and to what degree is it about phenomenal collage? And, to the degree that the choice between the two was conscious, why was this choice made?

There are indeed many architectures. How shall this one to be classified?

3__

Chess Strategies



The following conceptual diagrams of the north facade of the building -- hierarchically *numero uno* in the architectural Form-Making proposition -- try to provide a basis for arriving at the/an answer. The north elevation/facade yields the conceptual diagram that underlies the iconic view of the project, the oblique, 3/4 view from Campus Walk, Lowe Library, etc. I juxtapose this diagram to a diagram of what the project could have been.

Actual Strategy: BOOK ENDS/AUTONOMY

LITERAL COLLAGE + literal transparency

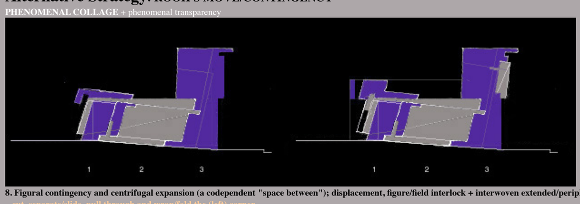


7. Figural autonomy and centripetal containment (a trapped/book-ended center); side-by-side abutment of autonomous forms + isolated center tilting
1 Short masonry mass; 2 Glass mass (enclosed ramps); 3 Tall masonry mass

7. Three **autonomous masses** comprise this **ABA neo-classical system**. Each of the three masses is self-sustaining -- if any two masses were to be removed, the remaining mass, because of the way each has been designed, would yield no clue that anything was missing. There are **no formal repercussions** or inflections of one mass made manifest on another. One mass stops, the other starts. Similar materials and blockiness distinguish the end masses from the center, but each of these end masses could stand as complete, whole buildings if the other were removed because they are **not codependent figurally**. Neither is the space between them codependent. The forms signified by this diagram (i.e., the project as built) are autonomous forms not contingent forms. This autonomy finds expression through two **independent systems** of **juxtaposed dissimilar materials** (shown here as blue and gray). It is an architecture of **univalency** (i.e., there is only one reading of the form relationships), of **inward, centripetal forces** that reinforce the dominance of a **trapped center**, as well as alternating (ABA) conditions of physical opacity/transparency/opacity (i.e., literal transparency) and stasis/movement/stasis. While x-axial or lateral movement is implied by the ramp within the glass center mass, this force is trapped or **book-ended** -- there is **no peripheral expression of the ramp** -- and it is therefore subordinate to the dominant force of **z-axial frontality**, which governs the side-by-side abutment of three **independent building blocks**. The principle organizing devices -- side-by-side abutment/book ends + isolated center tilting -- establish a **static system** of **non-turbulence** and **non-disruption** at the secondary and tertiary levels of form- and space-making, yielding an assemblage of **absolute** and **autonomous non-relationhips** (i.e., **literal collage**).

Alternative Strategy: ROOK'S MOVE/CONTINGENCY

PHENOMENAL COLLAGE + phenomenal transparency



8. Figural contingency and centrifugal expansion (a codependent "space between"); displacement, figure/field interlock + interwoven extended/peripheral tilting
...cut, separate/slide, pull through and wrap/fold the (left) corner
1 Rook Fragment; 2 Codependent Space Between; 3 Rook

...the conception of the world as law-bound in the relation of simple elementary components, yet open, unbounded, and contingent as a whole. _Meyer Scaphiro, "On Some Problems of the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs"

8. These diagrams, which take Tschumi's basic ABA sub-division as the starting point, are examples of an **alternative diagram-type**. They illustrate the principle of **contingency**. They suggest the presence of an integrated, **dynamic system** of **interlocking**, **contingent fragments** organized on the basis of **classical** (i.e., Roman [see Rowe, *Collage City*]) and **hypermodernist** (i.e., Cubist-based) principles of **ambiguity** and **reciprocity** of figure/field. **Devices of contingency** include **negative-positive form making** and the **rook's-move** of implied **lateral displacement**, which produces a **codependent space between**. The disposition of **collage fragments** function to reflect the **dialectic** between the **autonomy of form** and the **contingency of object/s**. The resulting assemblage is more a **contingent fabric** than an autonomous object. Fragments are **codependent figurally** with the other fragments that comprise the **codependent visual field**, including the existing site (were the diagram to be advanced from this point it would be essential to include the facade of Butler Library, to the left, if not also the buildings on the other side of Broadway to the right, as well as an indication of the Broadway building in front of the "Rook"). This diagram-type also expresses **centrifugal, lateral forces** that help to liberate the center from its ABA straight-jacket. In contrast to the actual strategy, here the emphasis is on **extension** to the **edges**, **incompletion**, **fragmentation**, and form-readings of **difficulty** and **fugal multivalency**. Z-axial frontality and **x-axial laterality** are in **tension**. Architecture is a **contingent fragment of a larger whole**. The principle organizing devices -- figure-field interlock & shift/displacement (cut, separate/slide, pull through and wrap/fold the corner) + interwoven extended/peripheral tilting -- allow for secondary and tertiary **turbulence** and **discontinuity** within a highly stable **dynamic system** of **multi-contingent inter-relationships** (i.e., **phenomenal collage**).

Diagrams such as these do not -- and cannot -- dictate what a building must look like. There are countless potential manifestations of any given diagram, and the diagram itself is subject to endless permutations and refinements as an architecture is studied intensely in models and drawings. But such "parti" diagrams do identify the **organizing principles** that function to sustain and explain, in part, why a building ends up looking the way it does. Moreover, their validity is independent of materials. In other words, the blue components and the gray components in these diagrams may signify any materials one chooses, including the materials that Tschumi chose to use. These diagrams are about *relationships* -- ***abstract*** **relationships** that have very real visual consequences.

4__

Meditation: the crisis of abstraction...

Inasmuch as the primary contribution of the twentieth century to the march of art history is no less than the invention of **abstraction**, it may only be fitting that Lerner Hall should signify, as we approach this century's end, the **crisis of this idea**.

Ultimately, this is an architecture that relies on the literal matching of physical materials and details (e.g., a half-round glass-block molding on the Broadway facade that aligns with McKim, Mead & White's limestone half-round molding) and semi-literal compliance with the MM&W master-plan as the principle devices of site-specific contextual integration. Alternatively, a strategy of phenomenal collage might well have been adopted, even without a significant transformation of the plan, by which the integration is evidence of greater abstraction and **difficulty**. Such a strategy allows for liberation of a project from too subservient and intellectually troubling reliance on existing buildings for the formulation of an aesthetic of materials and forms. [Addendum 9.22.99: It liberates an architecture from what Herbert Muschamp astutely refers to as "fearful interpretations of context"; The New York Times, September 19, 1999, available at http://archives.nytimes.com/archives "Peeking Inside Other People's Dream Houses".]

It sets it free to address the often more compelling questions: How may one, through the introduction of abstract principles of what I call an **imported site** (i.e., through the integrity of one's own coherent form-making principles, simultaneously solid and elastic), through the attendant materials and devices of a progressive aesthetic system, through a **lateral-minded** parsing of the underlying abstract properties -- the formal/spatial matrix -- of an existing local context, heighten perception of a site's intellectual and visual structure? How may one make a site-specific architecture that is phenomenal as opposed to literal? How may the positive-tension and opposition between new (21st-century) and old (19th-century) systems arise out of an advanced assertion of **abstraction** *versus* **decoration**? How may one, in the game of architecture as Tschumi has defined it -- where form is content, where formal "moves" apparently are "meaning" (i.e., what I call **Move as Meaning**, versus the game played by Le Corbusier and Terragni, for example, whose architectures involved the added complexity of narrative/literary meaning and secondary resonances: i.e., **Move as/and Meaning**) -- make of an architecture an optical instrument for revealing what lies beneath the surface of things as they are?

The stakes are high when millions of dollars are spent -- a fraction of what Hollywood would spend on a worthless film, to be sure (but that's an essay for another day). When the institution spending the money also happens to signify the highest level of intellectual prowess, when the project happens also to be in New York City, the cynosure of world intellectual/cultural consciousness, when the project is produced by an architect of no small international importance, and when the project is intended to endure -- permanently -- as a record of last-moment-before-the-millenium, but **post-Frank-Gehry-at-Bilbao** architectural thought, to endure in the same way the McKim, Mead & White buildings, symbols of an age at the turn of the last century, endure today and will be maintained in perpetuity by Columbia, the stakes -- and the expectations -- are logarithmically higher.

Presumably, one intends that the product resulting from this remarkable intersection be, if nothing else, **didactic**. And of course it is, by definition. That is to say, whether didacticism was fundamental to the thought process or not (i.e., whether it was a **conscious** , articulated aspect of the project's intellectual premises or not), as Tschumi and Columbia wrestled with what form a new architecture should take, the resulting building teaches something. The question I raise here is this: What precisely is it teaching? What lessons about architecture proceed from this work and will endure in the minds of the public and the ardent, contemplative student? What **deep principles** of architectural form-making and space-making does this project, either intentionally or implicitly, teach?

5__

deep_SIGHT | Zero-to-Ten Index (Final Score: 5)

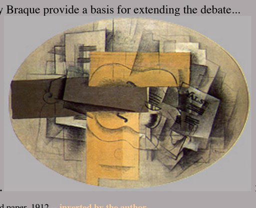
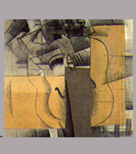
1. Postage-stamp view from the fourth floor of the moving escalators that descend to the basement bookstore: 10
2. Tilting banks of stainless-steel mailboxes on the 3rd and 4th floors: 10
3. Butcher-block stepped seating parallel the tilting banks of stainless-steel mailboxes on the 3rd and 4th floors: 1
4. Literal transparency (exterior/interior): 10
5. Phenomenal transparency at auditorium interior north facade: 10
6. Phenomenal transparency everywhere else (exterior/interior): 1
7. Literal collage (exterior): 10
8. Phenomenal collage (exterior): 1
9. 9% of the exterior that is the ramp: 9
10. 91% of the exterior that is not the ramp: 2
11. Overall exterior: 3.5
12. Overall interior -- aesthetic spirit: 7
13. Overall interior -- execution: 5
14. Auditorium, all things considered: 8
15. Bull-nose (half-round) motif (glass-block exterior wainscot, glass stair-enclosure facing Butler Library, security desk...): 2
16. Spiral stair behind the bull-nose glass stair-enclosure facing Butler Library:8
17. Metal bench on upper stair landing: 9
18. Device of tilting: 10
19. Northeast exterior corner (including round brick column): 1
20. Spatial expansion at upper level of ramp hall (level 5): 9
21. Opposition of interior planar concrete facade vs. deep space of the hyper-techno steel ramps that define the spatial void of the ramp hall: 10
22. Idea of the hyper-techno steel ramps: 10
23. Execution of the hyper-techno steel ramps: 6
24. Aesthetic of materials and light, exterior/interior, all things considered: 6
25. Importance of the ceiling of the ramp hall: 10
26. Actual design of the ceiling of the ramp hall (including color and form): 4
27. Actual design of the ceiling of the ramp hall if the color were changed from white: 5
28. User sociology of the place: ?
29. Linear light fixtures in concrete soffit, 4th floor: 10
30. Round recessed lights in underside of concrete ramp, lower main level: 2
31. Implicit assertion of form as content: 10
32. Implicit/explicit assertion of parallel meaning (e.g., narrative content, such as Le Corbusier at Assembly Hall, Chandigargh, or Terragni at The Danteum): 1
33. Professional competence of the design of the "Chess pieces," inside and outside, overall: 6
34. Power of the design of the "Chess pieces," inside and outside, overall, to edify and move the heart and exhilarate the spirit: 3
35. Nature of the "Chess game" being played, including organizational site strategy, visual site strategy, and underlying philosophical premises of the aesthetic system (devices and materials) adopted for the design of the "Chess pieces": 3
36. **Chess pieces/Chess game, all things considered: 5** (relative to both all other buildings built and to architectural history)
37. Degree to which it's okay that this architecture is different from what I would do or teach because there are many architectures: 10
38. Degree to which it reflects the progressive spirit of all that we associate with an advanced intellectual institution, a fast paced city, and a talented internationally significant architect at the threshold to the post-Bilbao 21st-century: 5
39. Degree to which it's clear this isn't Paris, Rotterdam, or LA (aesthetically and intellectually speaking): 10
40. Probability that were I to hear Tschumi lecture about the project I'd have a greater appreciation for it: 6
41. Degree to which the interior calls into question the datum of normalcy, with respect to heightened perception of danger and what's level; or, heightens perception of the potential of destabilizing complexity: 10
42. Degree to which the project conveys an authority, weightiness, and strength -- and a magical quality of illumination at night -- when viewed diagonally from across the main campus: 10

to be continued...

6__

Postscript Thursday 9.9.99

Additional Synthetic Cubist works by Braque provide a basis for extending the debate...

9. Braque, **Man with a pipe**, charcaol and pasted paper, 1912 -- inverted by the author
10. Braque, **The Violin: "Valse,"** oil and charcoal on canvas, 1913
11. Detail of the Braque: rotated counter-clockwise, flipped horizontally, cropped, by the author

What do you make of these?

The left collage, **Man with a pipe**, which I've turned **upside down**, with its looping figure-eight, which criss-crosses ramp-like between the minor (left) and major (right) wood-grain figures that define the dense, highly-charged space between, signifies the articulated, interlocking figure/field interrelationships of my proposed **Alternate Strategy** (fig. 8, above). It's an example of what I maintain is **phenomenal collage**.

But what about the oval collage -- **The Violin: "Valse"**? Do we find here in Braque's studies the presence of a diagram that lends support to the **Actual Strategy** (fig. 7, above) adopted at Lerner Hall? What is the same about this collage and Tschumi's building? What is different? Is the Braque an example of phenomenal or literal collage? What is the significance of the device of **interruption**? -- **disruption**? -- in its various forms and forces with respect to this classification?

MADISON G R A Y (AKA JEF7REY HILDNER) | deep_SIGHT
© 1999, 2016 by JEF7REY HILDNER

e-mail press@thearchitectpainter.com

"Why don't you come up to the office? I have paper cups and a free afternoon." "A zeugma," I said." _Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*

NOTE: for further discussion of architecture and collage, see the article on which this essay is based: Collage Reading: Braque/Picasso by JEF7REY HILDNER in the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture Annual Proceedings 84, 1996, pp. 181-187. The brilliant work by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter in *Collage City*, The MIT Press, 1978, is the essential reference in any discussion of the solid/void or figure/ground dialetic; specifically, the remarkable chapter "Crisis of the Object; Predicament of Texture," to which, thankfully, my colleague Penny Yates turned my attention in 1993.

click on icon to return to deep_SIGHT Table of Contents

JEF7REY HILDNER (aka Madison Gray, Eliot Plum, and Henry Trucks) is an architect, a painter, and a writer. Author of ***Garches 1234***, ***Picasso Lessons***, ***Daedalus 9***, and ***Henry Trucks—Painter***, his award-winning work and his essays on the theory and practice of art appear in a wide range of publications, including ***Global Architecture Houses***, ***Journal of Architectural Education***, and the book ***Architectural Formalism***, which features his essay "**Formalism: Move | Meaning**" alongside essays by theorists Rosalind Krauss, Peggy Deamer, Robert Slutzky, and Colin Rowe. Hildner focuses on **Formalism** in his forthcoming book ***Visual Ef9ects***, the title of his presentation at the 2016 Syracuse University Florence Architecture Program symposium, "**The F Word**." He earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Princeton University.

Profile: www.thearchitectpainter.com/profile.html

See also my pamphlet PICASSO LESSONS: The Sixth Woman of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*.
Which zooms in on what I call **Significant Space**: the product of a design in which FORM functions not only as SPACE-OCCUPIER, but also as SPACE-DEFINER.

COPYRIGHT © 1999, 2016 by JEF7REY HILDNER
e-mail press@thearchitectpainter.com
JEF7REYHILDNER | THE ARCHITECT PAINTER PRESS, SACRAMENTO, CA
All rights reserved